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From Teaching English to the Driest Desert in the World

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Camille Botello
18-19 Year Abroad in Chile
September 17, 2018

From Teaching English to the Driest Desert in the World

September started in celebration. It's Chile's national pride month, with the actual independence day being the 18th. But here, it's not only about the day; Chilean independence is present for the entire month and it is shown by hanging flags in front of every house and business, going out with friends on the weekends and eating an incredible amount of *asado*.

Aside from *el dieciocho*, Mel and I have started aiding English classes at both the Universidad del Bío-Bío and La Virgen del Carmen elementary school in a neighboring community. Both age groups have been so eager to learn more about the United States and our lives back home, but some of the questions they've posed have made me think more about where I come from.



With the 3rd graders

One student at the university said he feels like the US is more advanced than Latin America when it comes to things like security, education and healthcare. But has he not seen any news about school shootings, or social policy rollbacks? Some elementary school students asked me about my feelings about the Trump administration. Are all 3rd graders this aware of international politics? My host brother and his friends have asked me if I consider Chile to be a third world country, but do they think poverty is nonexistent in the US?

What I've gathered from these conversations is that many people here seem to be under the impression that the United States is not only the land of the free but also the land of the rich and the ingenuitive. Comparing the way I perceive my own home country with the way other people of the world do is something I've never been able to do before, and it has made me

think more about the global reputation the US has established for itself.

Interacting with people from different walks of life has been unlike anything I've ever done. You guys have to remember, I'm from a 3,000-person town in central Idaho, so before this experience I hadn't been exposed to this many people from other countries.

Mel and I traveled north to the driest desert in the world the first weekend of September: San Pedro de Atacama, Chile. There we perused the streets of the little *pueblo*, hiked to the peak of *La Valle de la Luna* (which rivals the Grand Canyon, by the way), and swam in the saltwater in *Las Lagunas Escondidas*. We met people from Brazil, Argentina, France, Germany, Belgium, England, Ireland and Scotland. We ate *empanadas* and listened to *reggaetón* by the campfire at our hostel. Although we were only there for the weekend, I saw so many things I never thought I'd get the opportunity to see.



The salt lagoons

September has started with adventure and altering perspective, and I can't wait to continue exploring this continent and meeting its people. Next stop— Buenos Aires, Argentina!

Hasta luego,

Camille